

Reworking Apartheid Legacies  
*Global Competition, Gender and Social Wages  
in South Africa, 1980-2000*

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## Acronyms

ANC	African National Congress
COFESA	Confederation of Employers of South Africa
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
DCD	Department of Constitutional Development
EOI	export-oriented industrialization
FDI	foreign direct investment
GDP	gross domestic product
GEAR	Growth, Employment, and Redistribution
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
IDP	Industrial Development Point
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
ILO	International Labour Organization
Iscor	Iron and Steel Corporation
ISI	import substitution industrialization
LED	local economic development
LRA	Labour Relations Act
MEC	minerals-energy complex
MERG	Macro-Economic Research Group
PoE	Panel of Experts
R	rand
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Program
RIDP	Regional Industrial Development Program
UF	Urban Foundation

## Summary/Résumé/Resumen

### *Summary*

In this paper, Gillian Hart examines the changing relationships between labour-intensive industrial production and the conditions of reproduction of labour in South Africa between 1980 and 2000.

In the early 1980s, the apartheid state offered generous incentives for labour-intensive industries to locate in “industrial decentralization points” either in or adjacent to former bantustans. Light industries—many of them from Taiwan (Province of China) and employing mainly women—mushroomed in these areas, while the number of heavy capital-intensive industries in the main urban centres decreased sharply. In 1991 the government of F.W. de Klerk, in response to fierce criticism from powerful South African business interests, slashed the subsidies. Since the mid-1990s, the post-apartheid state has embraced foreign direct investment (FDI) and export production as the centre-piece of its neoliberal policy. Yet until now, according to Hart, these promises have remained unfulfilled. Under pressure from cheap imports, employment in labour-intensive industry has shrunk dramatically, FDI has been minimal, and neoliberal imperatives have constrained redistributive social policies.

The paper draws both on secondary evidence and the author’s research in two former industrial decentralization points in northwestern KwaZulu-Natal with a strong connection to sites in East Asia, to advance three related arguments:

- First, the conditions of reproduction of labour are central to understanding the peculiarly South African forms of engaging with the global economy. These conditions are not only the result of social policies, but also of a much longer and deeper history of racialized dispossession and expropriation.
- Second, a gendered perspective is crucial to understanding the relationships between industrial production, social policy and the conditions of reproduction of labour. Yet an approach that focuses on the “impact of globalization” on women is severely limited. Instead, attention must be given to how gendered relationships and identities articulate with race, ethnicity and other differences; and how these, in turn, shape the forms and dynamics of industrial production. The ways in which Taiwanese industries have taken hold in South Africa provide vivid illustrations of the inextricable connections among class, gender and race; and of the complex histories that enter into the making of the social wage.
- Third, the paper underscores the importance of the politics of place, showing how dispossession and industrial production played out quite differently in two seemingly similar towns in South Africa during the apartheid era; how the social policies set in place after apartheid have filtered through configurations of local state power in strikingly different ways; and how strategies to attract foreign investment are provoking intense, but locally differentiated forms of struggle.

These local divergences illustrate the interconnections between workplace and community politics, and how these overlap with struggles in other social arenas to shape the social wage. The author contends that these three arguments underscore the contradictions and unsustainability of the neoliberal project in conditions of profound deprivation and inequality.

The argument unfolds in three parts. First, the paper outlines the emergence of labour-intensive forms of industrial production based predominantly on women's labour in decentralized regions of South Africa in the 1980s, and how Taiwanese investment took hold in these areas. The second section examines why East Asian investment in decentralized regions of South Africa has been so socially explosive. These comparative insights reveal how gender, race and other differences shape the dynamics of industrial accumulation. They also illuminate connections between production and the conditions of reproduction of labour—in particular, how agrarian histories have played into the formation of the social wage and shaped the conditions of global competition. The third section discusses the ANC government's embrace of neoliberalism in the mid-1990s, and shows how the local state has become a key site of the contradictory imperatives of redistribution and accumulation.

In extending the definition of the social wage beyond employment-based entitlements, or even conventional social policy, to encompass agrarian questions, the purpose of this paper is both political and analytical. This broader conception allows for a fuller understanding of how historically specific relationships between production and reproduction of labour have shaped divergent trajectories of low wage industrialization. In addition, in the context of post-apartheid South Africa, this extended definition helps draw attention to histories of racial dispossession. In the process, it holds open the possibility of broadly based claims for redistributive justice based on citizenship rights, and for linking struggles in multiple arenas as well as across the rural-urban divide.

By focusing on the relationship between production and the conditions of reproduction of labour, Hart calls attention to the historically specific—and deeply gendered as well as racial—processes and practices that have shaped what are, in effect, sharply divergent trajectories of labour-intensive forms of industrialization.

In the post-apartheid era, the social and spatial legacy of dispossession is evident in the profound tensions between production and the conditions of reproduction of labour. These tensions, in turn, have become condensed within the so-called “developmental local state.” The paper also outlines how structural constraints inherited from the past are being reworked in significantly different ways in seemingly similar places.

Through a comparative focus on the connections between production and the conditions of reproduction of labour, Gillian Hart sheds new light on agrarian questions. The point of drawing on East Asian connections to dramatize the history of dispossession, says the author, is not to propose a technocratic redistributive “solution” to the evident limits of low-wage export production in post-apartheid South Africa. Instead, these connections provide a means for delinking the land question from agriculture narrowly defined, and re-articulating it in terms of the social wage and broader livelihood imperatives.

At least in principle, a broadly based and historically grounded redefinition of the social wage holds open the possibility for organized labour to shift from a rearguard defence of

diminishing, relatively well-paid and predominantly male jobs to forging broader alliances and coalitions with other social forces—including those pressing for agrarian reform, as well as other movements such as those taking shape around HIV/AIDS—to engage both with macroeconomic policy, and with locally and regionally specific conditions. A strategy of connecting struggles in multiple arenas is not simply a matter of pitting “civil society” against “the state,” but of recognizing how they define one another through constantly shifting engagements. Whether and how a strategy of linking what are commonly seen as separate rural and urban struggles under the rubric of the social wage could work in practice is likely to hinge crucially on understandings of gender not simply as “women”, but as defining elements in the exercise of power, deeply entwined with race, ethnicity and other dimensions of difference, as well as with the material conditions in which people find themselves.

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### ***Résumé***

Gillian Hart examine ici l’évolution des relations entre la production industrielle à forte intensité de travail et les conditions de reproduction de la main-d’œuvre en Afrique du Sud entre 1980 et 2000.

Au début des années 1980, le régime d’apartheid était généreux lorsqu’il s’agissait d’inciter des industries à forte intensité de travail à s’implanter dans des zones de décentralisation industrielle, à l’intérieur ou à proximité des anciens bantoustans. Les industries légères, pour beaucoup originaires du Taiwan (Province de Chine) et employant une main-d’œuvre essentiellement féminine, poussèrent comme des champignons dans ces zones, tandis que le nombre d’industries lourdes à forte intensité de capital diminua dans les grandes agglomérations urbaines. En 1991, le gouvernement de Klerk, face aux critiques virulentes de la part de puissants intérêts économiques sud-africains, réduisit considérablement les subventions. Depuis 1995, l’Etat de l’après-apartheid fait des investissements étrangers directs (IED) et de la production pour l’exportation la pièce maîtresse de sa politique néolibérale. A ce jour, pourtant, cette politique n’a pas, selon Gillian Hart, tenu ses promesses. Des importations bon marché ont provoqué une contraction de l’emploi dans les industries à fort coefficient de main-d’œuvre, les IED ont été minimes et les impératifs néolibéraux ont fait obstacle à une politique sociale de redistribution.

L’auteur s’appuie sur des sources secondaires et sur les recherches qu’elle a effectuées dans le nord-ouest du KwaZulu-Natal, dans deux anciennes zones de décentralisation industrielle très étroitement liées à des sites de production d’Asie orientale, pour avancer trois arguments connexes:

- Premièrement, les conditions de reproduction de la main-d'œuvre sont d'une importance cruciale si l'on veut comprendre la manière spécifiquement sud-africaine de s'intégrer dans l'économie mondiale. Ces conditions ne résultent pas seulement des politiques sociales mais tiennent profondément à un passé beaucoup plus ancien de spoliation et d'expropriation fondées sur la race.
- Deuxièmement, il est crucial, pour comprendre les rapports entre la production industrielle, la politique sociale et les conditions de reproduction de la main-d'œuvre, de différencier entre les hommes et les femmes. Toutefois, une étude se focalisant uniquement sur "les répercussions de la mondialisation" sur les femmes serait restreinte. Il faut s'intéresser plutôt à la façon dont les relations et identités marquées par une différenciation selon le sexe se conjuguent avec la race, l'appartenance ethnique et d'autres différences et dont celles-ci influent à leur tour sur les formes et la dynamique de la production industrielle. Les modes d'implantation des industries taiwanaises en Afrique du Sud illustrent de manière frappante les connexions inextricables entre la classe sociale, le genre et la race, ainsi que la complexité des éléments historiques entrant dans la composition du salaire social.
- Troisièmement, l'étude souligne l'importance du jeu politique local en montrant que la spoliation et la production industrielle ont joué un rôle très différent dans deux villes apparemment semblables d'Afrique du Sud durant l'apartheid; que, filtrées par les configurations du pouvoir local, les politiques sociales mises en place après l'apartheid ont produit des résultats étonnamment différents et que les stratégies conçues pour attirer les investissements étrangers provoquent des luttes acharnées, mais différenciées selon les endroits.

Ces différences locales illustrent les liens entre le lieu de travail et le jeu politique local et les recouvrements avec les luttes menées sur d'autres terrains sociaux pour la constitution du salaire social. Pour l'auteur, ces trois arguments soulignent les contradictions et le caractère indéfendable du projet néolibéral là où règnent un grand dénuement et de profondes inégalités.

L'auteur développe son argumentation en trois parties. Tout d'abord, elle relève l'émergence, dans les années 1980, de formes de production industrielle nécessitant beaucoup de main-d'œuvre, essentiellement féminine, dans les régions sud-africaines de décentralisation et montre comment les investissements taiwanais se sont implantés dans ces régions. Dans la deuxième partie, elle examine pourquoi les investissements est-asiatiques dans ces régions ont produit une telle explosion sociale. Ces observations comparatives révèlent comment le genre, la race et d'autres différences influent sur la dynamique de l'accumulation industrielle. Elles éclairent aussi les rapports entre la production et les conditions de la reproduction de la main-d'œuvre – en particulier la façon dont l'histoire agraire a contribué à la formation du salaire social et façonné les conditions de la concurrence mondiale. La troisième partie traite du passage du gouvernement de l'ANC au néolibéralisme vers 1995 et montre en quoi l'Etat local est devenu un lieu clé où s'affrontent les impératifs de redistribution et d'accumulation.

En élargissant la définition du salaire social au-delà des droits fondés sur l'emploi, ou même de la politique sociale classique, pour y inclure les questions agraires, le propos de cette étude est à la fois politique et analytique. Cette conception large permet de mieux comprendre en quoi des rapports historiquement spécifiques entre la production et la reproduction de la main-d'œuvre ont influé sur la différence des trajectoires qu'a pu suivre une industrialisation fondée sur des bas salaires. En outre, dans le contexte de l'Afrique du Sud de l'après-apartheid, cette définition élargie aide à mettre en évidence de multiples histoires de spoliation raciale. Ce faisant, elle

ouvre des possibilités, pouvant permettre d'émettre de larges revendications de justice distributive fondées sur les droits des citoyens et de relier entre elles des luttes menées dans des domaines divers et aussi bien dans les villes que dans les campagnes.

En dirigeant son attention sur la relation entre la production et les conditions de reproduction de la main-d'œuvre, l'auteur met en lumière les processus et pratiques historiquement spécifiques—et profondément liés au "genre" et à la race—qui ont fait suivre à des industries à forte intensité de main-d'œuvre des trajectoires en fait très divergentes.

Dans la période de l'après-apartheid, les séquelles sociales et spatiales de la spoliation sont évidentes dans les tensions profondes entre la production et les conditions de reproduction de la main-d'œuvre. Ces tensions se retrouvent, à leur tour, sous une forme condensée à l'intérieur de l'Etat local dit "développemental". L'étude souligne aussi que les contraintes structurelles héritées du passé sont actuellement remises en chantier de manières sensiblement différentes dans des lieux apparemment semblables.

En axant son étude sur les rapports entre la production et les conditions de reproduction de la main-d'œuvre et par son approche comparative, Gillian Hart éclaire d'un jour nouveau les questions agraires. Si elle a fait intervenir la connexion est-asiatique pour mieux illustrer l'histoire de la spoliation, explique l'auteur, ce n'est *pas* pour proposer une "solution" technocrate de redistribution aux limites évidentes auxquelles se heurte une production fondée sur de bas salaires et destinée à l'exportation dans l'Afrique du Sud de l'après-apartheid. Au contraire, cette connexion permet de dissocier la question foncière d'une agriculture définie au sens étroit et de la rattacher au salaire social et aux nécessaires moyens d'existence.

Une plus ample redéfinition du salaire social, qui s'appuierait sur des bases historiques, permettrait, du moins en principe, à la main-d'œuvre organisée d'abandonner un combat d'arrière-garde—c'est-à-dire la défense d'emplois relativement bien rémunérés et principalement occupés par des hommes, mais toutefois en recul—pour former des alliances et des coalitions avec d'autres forces sociales, notamment celles qui militent pour une réforme agraire, et d'autres mouvements tels que ceux qui s'articulent autour du VIH/SIDA, pour influencer à la fois sur la politique macro-économique et sur des conditions locales et régionales spécifiques. En reliant entre elles les luttes menées sur divers fronts, il ne s'agit pas seulement d'opposer à "l'Etat" "la société civile" mais de comprendre qu'ils se définissent mutuellement au travers des engagements qui ne cessent de changer. Une stratégie visant à intégrer sous la rubrique du salaire social les luttes des ruraux et des citoyens, généralement considérées comme bien distinctes, a-t-elle des chances de fonctionner en pratique et comment? Tout tournera sans doute autour de la capacité à ne pas assimiler la conception du "genre" seulement aux "femmes" mais à comprendre qu'elle définit des éléments de l'exercice du pouvoir qui sont intimement mêlés à la race, à l'appartenance ethnique et à d'autres différences, ainsi qu'à la situation matérielle des personnes.

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### **Resumen**

En este documento, Gillian Hart analiza las relaciones cambiantes entre la producción industrial intensiva que exige mucha mano de obra y las condiciones que favorecen la proliferación de la última, en Sudáfrica, entre 1980 y 2000.

A principios del decenio de 1980, el Estado del apartheid ofreció generosos incentivos a las industrias que requerían numerosa mano de obra para que se establecieran en “zonas de descentralización industrial” en antiguos territorios bantúes o en zonas adyacentes a los mismos. Las industrias ligeras—muchas de ellas procedentes de Taiwán (Provincia de China) y empleadoras principalmente de mujeres—se multiplicaron en estas zonas, mientras que el número de industrias pesadas que exigían un gran volumen de capital, situadas en los principales núcleos urbanos, disminuyó drásticamente. En 1991, el gobierno de de Klerk, en respuesta a las feroces críticas de las empresas poderosas de Sudáfrica al ver menoscabados sus intereses, recortó drásticamente los subsidios. Desde mediados del decenio de 1990, el Estado posterior al apartheid ha adoptado la inversión extranjera directa (IED) y la exportación de productos como estrategia principal de su política neoliberal. No obstante, según Hart, hasta ahora no se han cumplido estas promesas. Bajo la presión de los productos importados baratos, el empleo en la industria que necesita mucha mano de obra ha disminuido drásticamente, la IED ha sido mínima y los imperativos neoliberales han limitado las políticas sociales redistributivas.

Para presentar los siguientes argumentos relacionados con el tema, la autora se ha basado tanto en pruebas secundarias como en la investigación que ella llevó a cabo en las dos antiguas zonas de descentralización industrial en el noroeste de KwaZulu-Natal, donde se han establecido fuertes vínculos con lugares en Asia Oriental.

- En primer lugar, las condiciones que propician el incremento de la fuerza de trabajo son fundamentales para comprender la peculiar participación de Sudáfrica en la economía mundial. Estas condiciones no sólo son resultado de las políticas sociales, sino también de una historia mucho más larga y complicada de expropiación y despojo por motivos raciales.
- En segundo lugar, una perspectiva basada en la distinción por género es decisiva para comprender las relaciones entre la producción industrial, la política social y las condiciones que propician la proliferación de la fuerza de trabajo. Sin embargo, un enfoque centrado en el “impacto de la mundialización” en las mujeres es muy limitado. En cambio, es importante ver cómo las relaciones e identidades que tienen presente la distinción por género se asocian con la raza, la etnia y otras diferencias; y como éstas, a su vez, determinan las formas y la dinámica de la producción industrial. La forma en que las industrias de Taiwán se han establecido en Sudáfrica revela claramente las conexiones inextricables entre la

clase, el género y la raza; de la misma manera ilustra las complejas historias que contribuyen a la creación del salario social.

- En tercer lugar, se pone de relieve la importancia del sistema político establecido y se muestra el modo en que el despojo y la producción industrial se interpretaron de forma muy diferente en dos ciudades de Sudáfrica aparentemente similares en la época del apartheid; el modo en que las políticas sociales establecidas con posterioridad al apartheid se han filtrado a través de formas del poder local sorprendentemente diferentes; y el modo en que las estrategias emprendidas para atraer la inversión extranjera están provocando luchas intensas pero localmente diferenciadas.

Estas divergencias locales ilustran las interconexiones entre lugar de trabajo y políticas comunitarias, y el modo en que éstas coinciden con luchas en otras esferas sociales con el objeto de determinar el salario social. La autora afirma que estos tres argumentos destacan las contradicciones y la insostenibilidad del proyecto neoliberal en condiciones de grandes privaciones y desigualdad.

El argumento se divide en tres partes. En primer lugar, se subraya la aparición de una producción industrial intensiva que requiere considerable mano de obra, basada fundamentalmente en el trabajo de las mujeres en regiones descentralizadas de Sudáfrica en el decenio de 1980, y el modo en que la inversión de Taiwán tuvo éxito en estas zonas. En la segunda sección se analiza por qué la inversión de Asia Oriental en regiones descentralizadas de Sudáfrica ha sido tan explosiva desde el punto de vista social. Estas percepciones comparativas ponen de manifiesto el modo en que la distinción por género, raza u otro motivo, determina la dinámica de la acumulación industrial. También explican las conexiones entre la producción y las condiciones que favorecen el incremento de la mano de obra—en particular, cómo las historias agrarias han contribuido a la formación del salario social y han determinado las condiciones de la competencia mundial. En la tercera sección se discute la adopción del neoliberalismo por el gobierno del CNA a mediados de los años 90, y se muestra cómo los imperativos contradictorios de la redistribución y la acumulación han llegado a reflejarse fundamentalmente en el Estado local.

El propósito de este documento es tanto político como analítico, puesto que amplía la definición de salario social más allá de los derechos laborales y de la política social convencional, con el fin de abarcar las cuestiones agrarias. Esta concepción más amplia permite comprender mejor el modo en que las relaciones históricamente específicas entre producción y proliferación de mano de obra han determinado trayectorias diferentes de una industrialización llevada a cabo a expensas de salarios bajos. Además, en el contexto de la Sudáfrica posterior al apartheid, esta definición extendida ayuda a señalar la atención sobre historias de despojo por motivos raciales. En el proceso, se mantiene abierta la posibilidad de reclamos para una justicia redistributiva basada en los derechos ciudadanos, y para vincular los esfuerzos realizados en múltiples escenarios, así como a través de la brecha rural-urbana.

Al centrarse en la relación entre producción y condiciones que propician el incremento de la fuerza de trabajo, Hart señala los procesos y prácticas históricamente específicos—firmemente

basados en la distinción de género y raza- que han determinado las trayectorias claramente divergentes de las formas de industrialización donde se exige cuantiosa mano de obra.

En la era posterior al apartheid, el legado social y espacial de despojo se hace evidente en las grandes tensiones entre la producción y las condiciones que favorecen el incremento de la mano de obra. A su vez, estas tensiones se han condensado en el llamado “estado local del desarrollo”. Este documento enfatiza igualmente el modo en que las limitaciones estructurales, como legado del pasado, están reconsiderándose de maneras muy diferentes en lugares aparentemente similares.

A través de un enfoque comparativo de las conexiones entre la producción y las condiciones que favorecen el incremento de la mano de obra, Gillian Hart cambia la perspectiva de las cuestiones agrarias. La autora señala que, al recurrir a los vínculos con Asia Oriental para dramatizar la historia del despojo, no se propone ofrecer una “solución” redistributiva tecnocrática a los límites evidentes de la producción basada en salarios bajos en la Sudáfrica posterior al apartheid. Por el contrario, estas conexiones facilitan un medio para desvincular la cuestión agraria, de su sentido estricto, para enlazarla nuevamente en términos de salario social y de imperativos más amplios de subsistencia.

Al menos en principio, una redefinición del salario social de carácter general y respaldada por la historia mantiene abierta la posibilidad de que la fuerza de trabajo organizada, en lugar de defender en la retaguardia trabajos cada vez menos numerosos, concebidos para hombres y relativamente bien remunerados, pueda establecer alianzas y coaliciones más amplias con otras fuerzas sociales—incluidas aquellas que presionan para la introducción de reformas agrarias, al igual que otros movimientos como los creados en torno al VIH/SIDA— para participar tanto en la política macroeconómica como en las condiciones específicas locales y regionales. Una estrategia consistente en enlazar luchas en múltiples ámbitos no se trata simplemente de oponer “la sociedad civil” al “Estado”, sino de reconocer cómo se definen mutuamente a través de compromisos en continua evolución. En cuanto a la factibilidad y al modo de llevar a la práctica una estrategia que englobe bajo la misma rúbrica de salario social, las luchas rurales y urbanas normalmente consideradas por separado, es probable que dependa fundamentalmente de no considerar a las mujeres “simplemente como mujeres”, sino como elementos definidos en el ejercicio del poder, profundamente entrelazados con la raza, la etnia y otras dimensiones diferenciales, así como con las condiciones materiales en que se hallan las personas propiamente dichas.

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## **Introduction**

In the early 1980s, the apartheid state offered perhaps some of the most generous incentives in the world for labour-intensive industries to locate in “industrial decentralization points” either in or adjacent to former bantustans. Light industries—many of them from Taiwan (Province of China) and employing mainly women—mushroomed in these areas. At the same time, employment in heavy capital-intensive industries in the main urban centres decreased sharply. In 1991 the government of F.W. de Klerk, in response to fierce criticism from powerful South African business interests, slashed the subsidies.

Since the mid-1990s, the post-apartheid state has embraced foreign direct investment (FDI) and export production as the key to a prosperous global future. Yet until now these promises have remained unfulfilled. Under pressure from cheap imports, employment in labour-intensive industry has shrunk dramatically, FDI has been minimal, and neoliberal imperatives have constrained redistributive social policies.

This paper examines the changing relationships between labour-intensive industrial production and the conditions of reproduction of labour in South Africa since 1980. It draws on my own research in two former industrial decentralization points in northwestern KwaZulu-Natal that are deeply connected with sites in East Asia, as well as secondary evidence to advance three related arguments.

First, the conditions of reproduction of labour are central to understanding the peculiarly South African forms of articulation with the global economy. Yet these conditions are not only a matter of social policies (or lack thereof!), but also a much longer and deeper history of racialized dispossession and expropriation. Agrarian social property and power relations have played a central role in shaping regionally specific trajectories of labour-intensive production and social wages not only in South Africa but also in other parts of the world—including key regions of East Asia.

Second, a gendered perspective is crucial to understanding the relationships among industrial production, social policy and the conditions of reproduction of labour. Yet an approach that focuses on the “impact of globalization” on women is severely limited. Instead, attention must be given to how gendered relationships and identities articulate with race, ethnicity and other dimensions of difference; and how these, in turn, shape the forms and dynamics of industrial production. The ways in which Taiwanese industries have taken hold in South Africa provide vivid illustrations of the inextricable connections among class, gender and race; and of the complex histories that enter into the making of the social wage.

Third, the paper underscores the importance of the politics of place, showing how dispossession and industrial production played out quite differently in two seemingly similar towns in South Africa during the apartheid era; how social policies set in place after apartheid have filtered through configurations of local state power in strikingly different ways; and how

strategies to attract foreign investment are provoking intense, but locally differentiated, forms of struggle.

These local divergences provide further illustration of deep interconnections between workplace and community politics, and how these overlap with struggles in other social arenas to shape the social wage. Taken together with the other two arguments, they underscore the contradictions and unsustainability of the neoliberal project in conditions of profound deprivation and inequality.

The argument unfolds in three parts. The first section outlines the emergence of labour-intensive forms of industrial production based predominantly on women's labour in decentralized regions of South Africa in the 1980s, and how Taiwanese investment took hold in these areas. The second section draws on comparative connections to focus on the question of why East Asian investment in decentralized regions of South Africa has been so socially explosive. These comparative insights reveal how gender, race and other dimensions of difference shape the dynamics of industrial accumulation. They also illuminate connections between production and the conditions of reproduction of labour—in particular, how agrarian histories have played into the formation of the social wage, and shaped the conditions of global competition. The third section discusses the African National Congress (ANC) government's embrace of neoliberalism in the mid-1990s, and shows how the local state has become a key site of the contradictory imperatives of redistribution and accumulation.

In extending the definition of the social wage beyond employment-based entitlements or even conventional social policy to encompass agrarian questions, my purpose is simultaneously political and analytical. This broader conception allows for a fuller understanding of how historically specific relationships between production and reproduction of labour have shaped divergent trajectories of low-wage industrialization. In addition, in the context of post-apartheid South Africa, this extended definition helps draw attention to histories of racialized dispossession. In the process, it holds open the possibility of broadly based claims for redistributive justice based on citizenship rights, and for linking struggles in multiple arenas as well as across the rural-urban divide.

## **The Apartheid Era: Dispossession and Industrial Decentralization**

The rapid expansion of labour-intensive industrial production in South Africa in the 1980s is inextricably bound up with two key thrusts of apartheid spatial and racial engineering that intersected in complex ways with capitalist imperatives and with gendered livelihood strategies. One is the displacement of millions of black South Africans from the land and from urban areas in the preceding 20 years, and the formation of huge townships with urban-like densities in predominantly rural areas designated as bantustans. According to the Surplus Peoples Project, between 1960 and 1983, some 3.5 million people were displaced from rural and urban areas in "white" South Africa to settlements in the former bantustans; about half were from rural areas, 65 per cent from white-owned farms and 35 per cent from African freehold

land (Platzky and Walker 1985). Yet this figure is almost certainly an underestimate if the ongoing and accelerating evictions of African tenants and workers from white-owned farms are taken into account. Simkins (1983) calculated that the number of Africans living within the borders of bantustans grew from 4.2 million in 1960 (39 per cent of all Africans) to over 11 million in 1980 (52.7 per cent). Between 1980 and 1986, according to Simkins' more recent estimates, an additional 1.6 million black South Africans disappeared from rural "white" South Africa.

Massive agglomerations of population within bantustan borders defy conventional rural-urban categories. Colin Murray (1988) coined the term "displaced urbanization" to describe these huge, densely packed settlements in desolate patches of veld, many of them separated from former white towns and smaller cities by what apartheid planners (in appropriately militarist language) called buffer zones. The industrial estates that popped up during the 1980s were located either within relocation townships or, more often, in the buffer zones. Invariably they were within commuting distance of former white towns, where industrialists had access to the appurtenances of white privilege.

The rapid growth of decentralized industrial estates in the 1980s represented the culmination of more than 20 years of efforts by apartheid state functionaries to lure industries to the borders of the bantustans. The so-called border industrialization policy formed a key element of Hendrik Verwoerd's grand apartheid vision of stemming the flow of Africans to urban centres and containing them in "independent" bantustans. In addition to exemption from minimum wages under the industrial council system, border industry incentives included tax concessions, low interest loans, transport subsidies and tariff protection. Over the course of the 1960s, the extent of industrial decentralization was quite limited, and did little to stem the pace of African urbanization. Toward the end of the decade, the apartheid state intensified its efforts to reconfigure industrial geography and mesh it with "self-governing" bantustans, where forced removals and farm evictions were producing massive concentrations of dispossessed people. The Physical Planning and Utilization of Resources Act of 1967 placed strict controls on industrial expansion in the main metropolitan areas while stepping up incentives for industrialists to relocate in bantustan and border areas. During the 1970s, a number of relatively large-scale heavy industries with a predominantly male workforce were established in areas adjacent to rapidly expanding bantustans. These efforts to reconfigure the industrial space economy found ready legitimation in the discourse of scientific regional planning in ascendance at the time.

In 1981, just as spatial policies were becoming discredited in most of the capitalist world by the rise of neoliberalism, P.W. Botha's "reformist" administration unveiled a new regional strategy. The so-called Good Hope Plan dramatically increased incentives for industrial decentralization, with the emphasis shifting from tax concessions to direct cash subsidies. Under this new Regional Industrial Development Program (RIDP), subsidies were graded according to location, with "industrial development points" in more distant bantustan locations receiving higher levels than "deconcentration points" on the peripheries of major urban areas. Some bantustan

administrations like the Ciskei added extra incentives such as extended tax holidays, thereby creating what was widely seen as the most generous package of incentives in the world. At the national level, the huge increase in incentives was financed by windfall revenues from the sharp rise in gold prices in the early 1980s.

During the 1980s, predominantly female employment in decentralized industries grew, compared to the stagnation of the national economy and the poor performance of the manufacturing sector as a whole. In the 1970s, total manufacturing employment grew by over 35 per cent; over the 1980s it stagnated, and by the early 1990s there were 89,000 fewer jobs in manufacturing than there had been in 1982 (Joffe et al. 1995:6). Yet according to the industrial census, 147,000 new jobs were created in decentralized areas in the five-year period between 1982 and 1987; by the early 1990s, this figure had risen to over 250,000 (Urban Foundation 1990). Nearly 30 per cent of employment growth in decentralized areas was concentrated in KwaZulu-Natal, where evidence on shifts in the gendered structure of employment are also most comprehensive, according to a study by Posel, Friedman and Todes (1993), who assembled data from a variety of different sources. Between 1980 and 1991, the number of economically active people in manufacturing in KwaZulu-Natal rose by 10 per cent, largely as a consequence of the expansion of the clothing industry. African women accounted for virtually all of this increase, and their share of manufacturing employment jumped from 26 per cent to 33 per cent. In the country as a whole, national industrial census data indicate declining investment and employment in male-dominated sectors such as chemicals, metal and machinery over the 1980s, and the concomitant growth of female- and labour-intensive industries, such as clothing and textiles, many of them concentrated in industrial decentralization areas.

Taiwan formed by far the single largest source of foreign direct investment under the RIDP during the 1980s. By the end of the decade, between 300 and 400 Taiwanese industries were operating in the decentralized areas of South Africa. The predominance of Taiwanese investment was partly a reflection of diplomatic links between Taiwan and South Africa in a period when both were relatively isolated from international circuits. Changes in the trajectory of industrial accumulation in Taiwan were also important: by the early to mid-1980s, rapid industrial growth driven by extremely small-scale enterprises – many of them in rural and peri-urban regions – was beginning to run out of steam because of rising wages and exchange rate appreciation. At precisely the point that the apartheid state was offering massive subsidies, many Taiwanese industrialists were thus searching for alternatives and the Taiwanese state was actively encouraging them to move into foreign markets (Hart 1996a). There was, in short, a peculiar conjuncture in which a small but significant segment of the highly competitive global economy relocated to peripheral regions of South Africa just as male-intensive heavy industries were going into decline.

On the face of it, these patterns seem to signify the same sort of shift from import-substitution industrialization (ISI) to export-oriented industrialization (EOI) that happened in other parts of the world during this period – albeit in the context of aggregate decline. The most common interpretation is that South Africa in the 1980s represented an extreme form of a Latin American

ISI economy, with excessive state support for heavy industry inhibiting the more efficient deployment of scarce capital resources (Joffe et al. 1995). In a similar vein, the RIDP was widely portrayed as yet another instance of the heavy hand of the state distorting the optimal allocation of resources – an argument to which we shall return below. Yet the picture is more complicated. First, as Fine and Rustomjee (1996) have argued, the South African manufacturing sector does not adhere to the conventional model of ISI derived from the Latin American experience. Instead, it is part of what they call the minerals-energy complex (MEC), which is linked in turn to the highly concentrated character of South African corporate capital; a symbiotic but changing relationship between state corporations and private capital around the MEC; the limited capacity of the MEC to promote diversification out of the MEC core industries; a bloated financial system; and a tendency to channel resources abroad. In addition, they argue, export-orientation does not necessarily shift industrialization away from the MEC: “Most new manufacturing sector investment [in the 1990s] is taking place in mega-projects within the established MEC core, which as a whole has historically been export-oriented” (Fine and Rustomjee 1996:232). By the same token, the primary beneficiaries of export incentives set in place during the 1980s were core MEC industries, including the Iron and Steel Corporation (Isacor), armaments manufacturers and industrial chemicals.

In short, the conventional ISI/EOI dichotomy is problematic in the South African context, and certainly does not map on to male- and female-intensive industries. The more useful distinction, perhaps, is between MEC and non-MEC industries. The latter include clothing and textiles, food processing, metal fabrication, printing and furniture making, which were precisely the industries that sprang up in industrial decentralization areas in the 1980s under the aegis of the RIDP. Partly as a consequence of sanctions, much of their output was directed to the domestic market during the 1980s (Pickles 1991:81). In addition, the domestic market for clothing was relatively protected by tariffs through most of the 1980s; at the same time, Altman (1995) argued, even with extremely low wages in decentralized areas, South Africa could not compete with low-cost producers in other parts of the world.

In the early 1980s, when P.W. Botha launched the Good Hope Plan and the RIDP, a major rapprochement between the state and large-scale corporate capital was in progress. While the latter did not approve of the RIDP, they were willing to turn a blind eye to it. By the mid-1980s, the rapprochement was falling apart in the midst of escalating protest, the fusing of militant labour and community organization to form what has been called social movement unionism, growing international opposition to apartheid and the imposition of sanctions by the United States in 1986. It was in the context of this political and economic crisis that powerful business interests launched a major critique of the RIDP. Sponsored initially by the Urban Foundation (UF), the think-tank of big business, the critique was subsequently taken up by a Panel of Experts (PoE) appointed by the Development Bank of Southern Africa. Under pressure from this critique the de Klerk government slashed RIDP subsidies in 1991 and made the reduced package available throughout the country, not just in designated decentralization areas as in the past.

On one level, the critique of the RIDP was both easy and capable of unifying the left and the (neo-)liberal right. The link with apartheid and its institutions was palpable; wages were extremely low and bantustan authorities frequently sought to ban union activity; the incentives were absurdly large and easily abused; and some of the decentralization areas were patently incapable of surviving without subsidies. Yet the UF/PoE critique went much further, invoking neoliberal logic to argue that the RIDP was not only wasteful, inefficient and politically motivated, but also represented a hopeless effort to fly in the face of “natural tendencies” for industry to agglomerate in major urban centres. Thus, some critics maintained, the RIDP bore much of the blame for slow industrial growth in South Africa as a whole during the 1980s (see, for example, Tomlinson 1987). Flat assertions that industrial decentralization did not work in South Africa and had never worked anywhere in the world were rife. In short, the critique conjured up images of crazed apartheid spatial engineers seeking to turn back the tides of economic logic by locating factories in the middle of nowhere. It went hand-in-hand with arguments that South Africa’s future lay in the large metropolitan centres and that, with the lifting of what in the apartheid lexicon was known as “influx control” restrictions on mobility, which happened in 1986, large numbers of black South Africans who had been confined to relocation townships in the bantustans would simply pack their bags and move to the cities.

In the face of this onslaught, dissenting voices were few and far between. Yet those that arose made extremely important points. First, Trevor Bell (1983, 1986) argued that the movement of labour-intensive industries to peripheral regions since the early 1970s was not simply the result of apartheid policies that distorted incentives but was driven in large part by industrialists’ search for lower production costs in the face of intensified global competition. Neoliberal critics of the RIDP either dismissed or underplayed what Bell termed “spontaneous decentralization”. They also ignored tendencies toward industrial dispersal in many different parts of the world – including not only Taiwan and China, but also the much-vaunted “Third Italy”.<sup>1</sup> Yet while industrial dispersal became a characteristic feature of global capitalism in the late twentieth century, its multiple forms, dynamics and trajectories cannot be deduced simply from an abstract capital logic (Hart 1998).

A second set of dissenting arguments came from feminists who called for a more nuanced understanding of the complex and contradictory ways in which women’s entry into the industrial wage labour force was reconfiguring power relations within and between households (Ardington 1984; Bonnini et al. 1991; Jaffe 1988, 1991; Pudifin and Ward 1986; Posel et al. 1993; Posel and Todes 1995). These interventions reflected broader debates in the literature on women’s industrial labour (for example, Elson and Pearson 1981), but were firmly situated in the context of South African racial capitalism. While pointing to appalling wages and working conditions in decentralized industries, feminists also called attention to the contradictory character of these jobs—how, for example, they provided women with more room to manoeuvre in the context of influx control restrictions on mobility; how access to industrial

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<sup>1</sup> “Third Italy” refers to the northeast and centre of Italy, which experienced rapid growth through the development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The SMEs were concentrated in specific sectors and localities, and managed to obtain a strong position in world markets.

wage employment enabled women to maintain somewhat more independent lives; and how industrial jobs provided an alternative to what were often even worse alternatives, namely domestic labour and work on white farms.

In addition to endorsing these arguments about the contradictory implications of the RIDP for women in relocation townships, Laurine Platzky (1995) added a third layer of complexity to the simplistic neoliberal critique. On the basis of detailed studies in three decentralization areas in the late 1980s, she called attention both to the diversity of local dynamics and to the unanticipated consequences of industrial dispersal. These included the emergence of labour organizing in some—although not all—areas: “Whereas trade union organisation may have stunted the growth of low paid employment, such that plants paying less than R100 per month have been eliminated, trade unions have ensured higher wages for some IDP [industrial development point] workers” (Platzky 1995:286). On the basis of more complete evidence than that deployed by either the Urban Foundation or the Panel of Experts, Platzky also argued that, in a decade of severe economic recession, the RIDP had contributed to the survival of certain highly competitive manufacturing sectors and to the entry of new manufacturing products and processes.

It was in the context of these debates that I commenced research in 1994 in two decentralization areas in northwestern KwaZulu-Natal, Ladysmith-Ezakheni and Newcastle-Madadeni. Like many such areas, they comprise former white towns located within 15–25 kilometres of huge black relocation townships formed through dispossession. In 1994–1995 I worked collaboratively with Alison Todes in Newcastle, where we conducted an industrial survey to trace trends in industrial employment since 1991 when RIDP subsidies had been slashed. My interest during this period was focused on Taiwanese investment, which was substantial in Newcastle. Alison Todes’ work grew out of her observation that female migration into Madadeni had increased during the second half of the 1980s—precisely the period in which influx controls had been lifted, and people were supposed to be flocking into the main metropolitan centres. Our joint research in 1994–1995 engaged directly with the debates over industrial decentralization and employment during the 1980s, and carried them in some new directions.

First, our research illuminated sectoral and gendered shifts in employment in Newcastle during the first part of the 1990s, a period of industrial decline in the economy as a whole (Hart and Todes 1997). We documented a decline of 30 per cent in male-oriented employment between 1990 and 1994. Much of this contraction was in classic MEC industries—iron, steel and industrial chemicals—that had located in Newcastle in the early 1970s. The other large sector in Newcastle—clothing and textiles—registered a decline in employment of about 4 per cent—far below that in metropolitan areas in the same period. Yet most of the contraction came from the closure of two relatively large South African firms. Between 1990 and 1994, the number of very small clothing firms—the large majority Taiwanese—rose from 34 to 58 (Hart and Todes 1997). What had happened was that, despite sharply lower subsidies, small-scale Taiwanese knitwear

producers continued to move into Newcastle as part of a tightly integrated network of small firms very similar to the system of satellite production in Taiwan (Hart 1996a).

These patterns flew in the face of confident predictions by RIDP critics that industries would bleed away from decentralized areas once subsidies were lifted. While there have reputedly been large-scale factory closures in some of the more remote areas in other provinces, this was not the case in KwaZulu-Natal in the first half of the 1990s. An evaluation of the 1991 RIDP in the province conducted in 1996 suggested remarkable stability in the other two main decentralization areas—Ezakheni and Isithebe (Harrison and Todes 1996). This study also documented how, in the face of intensifying competition, small clothing and textile firms were moving into other peripheral parts of the province in search of lower costs. At a general level these patterns are, of course, consistent with Bell's argument about the importance of competitive pressures rather than just apartheid subsidies as key forces driving decentralization of labour-intensive industries. We argued that these industries are indeed fragile, but that the fragility derives less from the lifting of subsidies than intensifying competition and escalating labour conflict, particularly in Taiwanese firms (Hart and Todes 1997).

A second broad contribution of the Newcastle study was to illuminate the reworking of transnational connections through which industrialists from Taiwan—and increasingly other parts of Asia, especially mainland China—were coming into South Africa. Through the 1980s, Taiwanese industrialists were typically channelled through bantustan investment corporations. Newcastle was the exception. In the mid-1980s the white local government officials in Newcastle set up their own recruiting system in Taiwan. Essentially, this was a competitive response to actions by the KwaZulu bantustan investment corporation, which had allocated the bulk of resources to the industrial estate in Ezakheni adjacent to the town of Ladysmith, 100 kilometres to the south. Over and above RIDP incentives, Newcastle local authorities offered prospective Taiwanese industrialists cheap luxury housing left empty when the planned expansion of a branch plant of Iscor fell through in the late 1970s. Through the 1980s, Newcastle became what was probably the single largest area of Taiwanese settlement in South Africa. By the early 1990s, the Newcastle model was being adopted by a number of other white local governments in towns all over South Africa. In short, despite the dramatic decline in subsidies, there arose a system of spontaneous transnationalism, with white local governments bypassing the national government and reaching directly into the global economy. I shall return in the latter part of the paper to talk about further changes in transnational connections in the post-apartheid period, as well as the insights that emerged from these connections in Newcastle and Ladysmith.

The third part of the Newcastle study consisted of in-depth interviews that Alison Todes conducted with members of 31 households, and a survey of a further 354 households in the Newcastle townships. These interviews helped to clarify why, contrary to widely held expectations, people in relocation townships adjacent to industrial decentralization points were not simply moving into the main metropolitan centres with the lifting of influx control. Todes showed how relocation townships had assumed the role often described for rural areas as a

“home base” of social security from which selected household members—predominantly men—make forays in search of employment and income elsewhere, while women perform reproductive labour as well as generating income.

Newcastle emerged as this kind of home base in the context of influx control when the movement of families to cities was difficult and accommodation hard to find. Children were left with grandmothers while daughters worked in the city, and wives returned home on marriage—or at least after they had children. When household members living in cities became unemployed or unable to find jobs, they returned ‘home’ to Newcastle. As in rural areas, pensioners retired there after working elsewhere for much of their lives. Newcastle also served as the place where the sick or disabled were looked after. Although the end of influx control has eased access to urban centres, lack of accommodation, violence, and the absence of secure employment has meant that Newcastle has retained its ‘home base’ functions (Todes 1997:317–318; see also Hart and Todes 1997).

Yet, Todes goes on to note, these areas are emphatically not rural. On the one hand, they were formed out of a process of dispossession and less than 4 per cent of households had access to land. On the other, most households derive some income locally, and access to service and infrastructure is higher than in most rural areas. In fact, as we shall see below, the apartheid state channelled fairly substantial subsidies into services in relocation townships like those outside Newcastle. One of the great ironies of the post-apartheid era is that these subsidies are being cut in the name of neoliberal austerity.

While relocation townships assumed the functions of a home base in the context of apartheid restrictions on mobility, such functions persist in the post-apartheid era. Apart from sharp contractions in employment in the main urban centres, other limitations on mobility became evident in the first half of the 1990s. Todes shows how residents have not only put years of effort and considerable resources into building and improving houses in relocation townships; in addition, particularly for women, place-based social networks nurtured over the years are a deeply meaningful and centrally important part of their lives. In short, many residents of what were widely labelled the “dumping grounds” of apartheid have painstakingly woven together a fabric of everyday life that provides at least a modicum of security.

Todes’ research also sheds light on some of the complex relations between women’s reproductive work and their access to extremely low wages and often harshly exploitative forms of industrial employment in industrial decentralization areas. The household survey revealed that only 25 per cent of women workers in the Newcastle clothing industry were married and that the largest single category (over 40 per cent) were daughters living with at least one parent, usually the mother, in three-generational households. Yet most were not young girls. In fact, the majority of women industrial workers in the sample were in the 26–50 age group. Todes’ work revealed powerful constraints on women’s mobility, arising not only from lack of options elsewhere but also their centrality to maintaining a base of social security. Evidence from life histories suggested that, in the past, a large proportion of men and smaller numbers of younger unmarried women had engaged in circular migration, sending back remittances to Newcastle that were often tied to housing improvements. Women who remained

in the townships formed the lynchpin of social security in extremely complex, spatially extended networks and flows of people and resources. Although the study was not a detailed inquiry into the operations of power and gender within and across spatial and social arenas, it pointed clearly to a growing pressure on women arising out of the collapse of male employment both within and beyond Newcastle. With the decline in remittances, local sources of income assumed additional importance. At the same time, a growing proportion of employment in the clothing industry was in the segment dominated by Taiwanese industrialists where wages were extremely low and labour relations particularly fraught with conflict.

The socially explosive character of East Asian investment in these regions of South Africa is far more than just an unpleasant episode in a turbulent history of labour relations. How East Asian forms of low-wage, labour-intensive production have been refashioned when transplanted to South Africa is very revealing of the operation of gender, race and ethnicity in relation to class processes. These transnational connections also shed new light on the relationships between production and the conditions of reproduction of labour. In particular, they raise questions about the social wage in a way that links it directly to sharply divergent agrarian histories. These connections, in turn, illuminate the contradictions inherent in the neoliberal project, particularly in the context of the deeply racialized material inequalities that remain a pervasive feature of the post-apartheid era.

### **East Asian Connections: Gender, Race and the Social Wage**

A growing body of feminist research in Asia and elsewhere—much of it based on participant observation on factory floors and in the communities where workers live—has shown how even the seemingly most despotic and coercive low-wage factory regimes are to some degree negotiated orders, albeit highly asymmetrical ones. While workers are certainly subject to a powerful array of disciplinary forces, they often construct alternative interpretations and definitions. Such “cultural struggles” (Ong 1991) do not necessarily have direct political effects; in some circumstances they may indeed become part of a process of accommodation or partial consent to industrial work discipline and familial pressures. A key point, however, is that these processes can and do vary markedly, even in conditions that on the surface appear quite similar. A great deal depends on how cultural and symbolic resources are deployed and reconfigured through everyday practice not only on the factory floor, but also in other social arenas.

A particularly interesting example of this type of approach is Lee’s (1995) comparative study of management practices and worker strategies in two factories owned by the same company, one in Hong Kong (at that time, still a city-state) and the other in Shenzhen (just over the border in China). Lee shows how gendered practices on the shopfloor were very different, and how this in turn reflected differences in the historical constitution of the workforce, as well as in the everyday conditions and practices of social reproduction. Most of the workers in China were young, unmarried women migrants, whereas those in Hong Kong were mainly older married women. Participant observation enabled Lee to illuminate the varied ways that the local

communal institutions within which workers were situated became incorporated in shopfloor practices:

Localistic networks in Shenzhen and family and kin in Hong Kong mediated the supply of labor and provided resources that neither the state [n]or employees offered to women. Incorporating localism and familialism into the respective factory regimes reduced management's financial burden, legitimized management control, and satisfied workers' mundane interests. (Lee 1995:394)

She argues that while management manipulated the gendered hierarchies of localism and familialism to exercise greater control, workers invested them with their own understandings and used them to temper and mitigate managerial domination. These practices also reflected a set of meanings which, while contested, were sufficiently shared to provide the basis for negotiation—as well as worker acquiescence.

Another important example is Hsiung's (1991, 1996) research based on participant observation in unregulated small-scale factories in Taiwan, which provides a detailed understanding of paternalism as a product of constant struggle and negotiation on the factory floor. In many of these factories, married women from the local community have come to constitute a large proportion of the workforce. In the course of working in such factories, Hsiung observed considerable conflict between workers and employers. Workers' resistance was, however, informal, individualized and clandestine, and expressed in the idiom of paternalism:

because pre-existing family/kinship systems are intertwined with the production unit, the conflict of interest between the factory owner and waged workers often takes the form of familial disagreement. The construction of paternalism illustrates the constant struggle between those who own the means of production and those who sell their labor... (Hsiung 1991:148-149).

Both owners and workers were deeply invested in personalistic constructions. Workers invoked the concept of "help" to drive home that they were not simply selling labour, but also providing a personal commitment in return for which they expected a variety of favours; employers for their part engaged in petty acts of "goodwill," which doubled as personal debts that were reclaimed when owners made excessive demands on workers (Hsiung 1991:186-187). Rather than simple coercion, labour relations were constantly renegotiated in the idiom of familial obligation. Some employers also deployed appeals to ethnic pride. In short, gender, kinship, local community and ethnic identity provided the cultural raw materials from which production relations and work experiences were fashioned in satellite factories.

The centrality of kinship idioms as the currency of negotiation between male managers and women workers is a consistent theme in the ethnographic literature. Some of these studies also yield insights into very different articulations of racial/ethnic and sexual/gender difference. Ong (1987) for example describes how managers of Japanese firms in Malaysia emphasized their racial and national superiority vis-à-vis Malay women workers. At the same time, they invoked a familial discourse that defined women workers as "children" who should "obey their parents".

These insights offer some important clues into the dynamics at play when Taiwanese industrialists moved to South Africa. As I argue more fully in my book, the depth and intensity of conflict derived at least in part from the way racial and gendered difference were being constructed in relation to one another (Hart 2002). The majority of Asian industrialists, who had come from a setting in which negotiations with women workers are conducted in the idiom of family and kinship, constructed African women workers as so different that they had no means of invoking and deploying these idioms.

The anger and resentment that workers experienced is captured very precisely in the phrase I heard repeated a number of times—namely, their sense of being treated “just like animals”. Virtually all the workers with whom I met spoke bitterly of their sense of ill-treatment in Taiwanese factories. All complained about low wages and of being driven to work unreasonably hard through the “score” system—a minimum level of production that workers have to meet. In almost all of these discussions, however, workers talked most fully and eloquently about everyday practices and conditions in the factories that they found demeaning—one of the most consistent complaints being about poor toilet and kitchen facilities which, many of them said, showed their employers’ lack of concern about them as people. One woman provided a particularly interesting example of how she had gone about trying to shame her employer. She described how she had complained about respiratory problems caused by fluff from acrylic yarn. When her employer ignored her complaint, she wore a surgical mask to work not only to facilitate her breathing; her purpose, she made clear, was to demonstrate the level of pollution in the factory and to assert her humanity. In one way or another, all of the workers with whom I spoke expounded on this theme of inhumanity, expressing a profound sense of affront at being treated just like animals. Their bitter complaints about harsh treatment by Taiwanese industrialists resonated with how industrialists frequently constructed workers in terms such as their having “not yet entered civilization”.

In short, I suggest, the particular ways in which most Taiwanese industrialists produced understandings of racial difference undermined their capacity to engage with workers on anything other than openly coercive terms. Yet these dynamics were neither uniform, nor cast in stone. The exceptions were in some ways just as revealing. In the course of conducting the industrial survey in Newcastle, Alison Todes and I were struck by how a small group of Taiwanese industrialists actively distanced themselves and their labour practices from those of their compatriots and declared themselves quite satisfied with worker productivity. They also waxed eloquent in describing their own ingenuity. Unfortunately it was not possible to elicit workers’ experiences of and reactions to the strategies these industrialists described. Even so, the origins and representations of these self-proclaimed “good bosses” are quite revealing of their strategies to recreate paternalism.

With one key exception, all were former technicians who came to South Africa to work for the first round of industrialists and had considerable experience on the factory floor. All started on a very small scale and then expanded—in sharp contrast to their original bosses, most of whom

had contracted the scale of their operations. In several cases they were engaged in direct competition with their former bosses. Nevertheless their capacity to expand their scale of operations appeared limited by precisely the strategies they deployed to elicit worker consent.

Several common threads run through the stories these industrialists told about their methods of coping with workers. First, they claimed a familiarity with workers' living conditions in the townships, together with careful selection of workers. Some claimed that they have visited workers' homes, and one described how he selected his workers from different townships; that way, if there was trouble in one of the townships he would be assured of workers from the others. The question of the conditions in which workers live is a crucial issue and is discussed further below.

Second, they portrayed their relations with workers in the language of generosity, paternalism and keeping workers happy: "If you help these people you can help yourself", declared one; "we're very free here". Often quite explicitly, they contrasted their generosity—encompassing higher wages, as well as parties, loans, sick pay, leave pay and other "gifts"—with the tight-fistedness of their compatriots from whom they actively distanced themselves. As is typically the case in clientilistic relationships, gifts often came with surveillance and other strings attached to them. For example, one industrialist explained how, if worker said she was sick, he sent a driver to her house to check that she really was sick; if so, he sent her to hospital and paid the bills. Compassion and familialism also had their limits. While declaiming that everyone in the factory was like a family, and his willingness to grant leave to workers for family crises, one industrialist stipulated, "one father, one mother, dead only once!"

Wages and work effort were also described in terms of gift-giving: "I give you the right money, you give me the right job". But the carrot of higher wages was combined with the stick of enforcement built into the forms of work organization common to all these factories. In all cases, workers were organized into mutually competing groups that were presented with a daily or weekly production quota. Group monitoring was the key enforcement mechanism: if a group failed to meet the quota, all workers were penalized even if only one or a subset of individuals failed to perform to the required standard. If they met the quota, they could either leave early or earn bonuses for additional production.

What was emerging, in short, was a paternalized system of piece rates through which these self-styled "good bosses" were able to produce a modicum of worker consent. Yet this strategy was also subject to sharp limits—in particular, none of these industrialists were able to expand the scale of their operations beyond about 30 workers.

Just as some industrialists began to discover ways of recreating paternalistic strategies of labour control, a new source of instability appeared in the form of identical knitwear produced in China. The competitive threat appeared suddenly and without warning. In the second half of 1994 when Alison Todes and I did our first round of research in Newcastle, imports were not an issue at all. When we returned in mid-1995, the Newcastle knitwear industry was in a state of

siege. Most industrialists blamed the influx of knitwear on corrupt customs officials, but they also conceded that it was a portent of things to come as trade liberalization took hold. Even the most enthusiastic proponents of free markets were adamantly opposed to the lifting of tariff barriers whose protection they had enjoyed. “If this government opens up the gates they kill all business”, declared one; jumping out of his chair, he demonstrated vividly how “they take a big wire and tie it around our neck; they take a big rock and drop it on our foot!”

Perhaps the ultimate irony was that the competition came from the compatriots of Newcastle industrialists who had moved to the southern coastal regions of China. Newcastle knitwear producers claimed that their counterparts in China could produce essentially the same commodities at prices below the costs of production in Newcastle. In my book, I draw on You-Tien Hsing’s (1998) study of a comparable group of Taiwanese industrialists who moved to Fujian province in China. What this comparative exercise makes clear are not only sharply different practices of labour discipline, but also the way redistributive reforms dating from the socialist era were underwriting accumulation.

The retention of peasant property—along with other state-sponsored subsidies securing the reproduction of the workforce—have been both underappreciated and absolutely central in defining the conditions of “global competition” emanating from both Taiwan and China. What is distinctive about China and Taiwan—and dramatically different from South Africa—are the redistributive land reforms beginning in the late 1940s that effectively broke the power of the landlord class. The political forces that drove agrarian reforms in China and Taiwan were closely linked and precisely opposite. Yet in both socialist and post-socialist China and in “capitalist” Taiwan, the redistributive reforms that defined agrarian transformations were marked by rapid, decentralized industrial accumulation without dispossession from the land.

To the extent that the relationship between the conditions of reproduction of labour and industrial accumulation in East Asia has been recognized, it has focused on housing in the city-states. In **The Shek Kip Mei Syndrome** (1990), Manuel Castells and his colleagues pointed out that state-subsidized public housing in Hong Kong and Singapore operated to lower the money wage while maintaining the social wage, and contributed substantially to industrial competitiveness. Yet at the time of this research, both were small city-states. In societies with large, and often impoverished rural populations, urban housing cannot perform this function without tight restrictions on access. This is precisely what happened in socialist China, where restrictions on movement were necessary to guarantee urban dwellers’ access to housing and other forms of social security. Beyond the city-states and urban China, connections between industrial production and the conditions of labour reproduction have been forged in the countryside.

These direct connections between production and the conditions of reproduction of labour in Taiwan and China draw attention to the significance of agrarian dispossession in South Africa. When Taiwanese industrialists moved to places like Newcastle and other decentralized regions of South Africa, they encountered a workforce expropriated from the land and thrust into

radically commodified forms of livelihood. The intensity of labour conflict unleashed by these forms of production derives, I suggest, not only from the inability of the majority of Taiwanese industrialists to deploy gendered forms of negotiation on the factory floor, but also from the absence of the sort of social wage subsidy that characterized Taiwanese and Chinese industrial trajectories. One rough indication of this point that I discuss more fully elsewhere (Hart 1995) is that in 1995, when cheap knitwear produced by Taiwanese industrialists in China began flowing into South Africa, wages in Taiwanese knitwear factories in Newcastle were nearly double those in Fujian when calculated in terms of prevailing exchange rates. Yet real wages—calculated in terms of purchasing power parity—were 30–40 per cent lower. In comparing their situation with those of their compatriots who had moved to China, Taiwanese industrialists in Newcastle consistently complained not only about low worker productivity, but also how much higher wages were in South Africa. What was missing, of course, was any sort of recognition of the radical inadequacy of these wages—or of how they themselves were the product of East Asian agrarian reforms.

This lack of recognition is particularly ironic, since part of what attracted Taiwanese industrialists to South Africa in the 1980s was precisely the availability of cheap luxury housing, as well as access to the appurtenances of white privilege—including educational, health and other facilities. As one industrialist put it, “you can live like a king in South Africa!” In addition, the English education that their children received in South African schools enabled them to become far more globally mobile than if they had been raised in Taiwan. There is, in fact, a double irony since it was precisely the converse of these racialized subsidies—namely dispossession—that has, at least in part, undermined the industrial strategies of Taiwanese capitalists in South Africa.

These claims have some important links with earlier debates, but with some new twists. A key argument in the race-class debate that raged during the 1970s was the reserve subsidy thesis, which posited that, at least until the first half of the twentieth century, capital drew on women’s labour in subsistence agriculture in the former reserves to subsidize the low wages of male migrant workers. The functionalist tendencies in this argument came under attack from those who pointed out that the deeply gendered migrant labour system, at least in part, reflected a degree of agency by patriarchal societies resisting full proletarianization. Despite this and other critiques, there is no question that mining capital, in particular, derived huge benefits from workers’ access to land in the reserves, particularly in the earlier phases of capitalist expansion. Essentially this paper turns the reserve subsidy thesis on its head, and argues that one of the defining features of South Africa in the post-World War II period is the depth and extent of racialized dispossession under apartheid that severely eroded the social wage—and that formed a key element of the terrain on which post-apartheid neoliberalism took hold. Since the mid-1990s, the erosion of the social wage has, if anything, accelerated for many South Africans.

## **Post-Apartheid Dynamics: Neoliberal Contradictions**

One of the great ironies of the post-apartheid era is the ANC's embrace of a home-grown form of neoliberalism. This shift to the right was not simply a consequence of top-down imposition of structural adjustment by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). On the contrary, Fine and Padayachee (2000:5) note acerbically that "South Africa is in the remarkable situation of having adopted and persisted with the policies of the Washington consensus when it was under no obligation to do so and, most ironically, after its nostrums had already been rejected by the most ardent exponents". As I argue more fully in my book, the neoliberal turn is most usefully understood in terms of complex political struggles within and beyond the ANC, in the course of which alternatives to neoliberalism were sidelined (Hart 2002). Chief among these were the comprehensive neo-Keynesian proposals set forth by the Macro-Economic Research Group (MERG) in its report entitled **Making Democracy Work**. Powerful figures within the ANC and the business community summarily dismissed the MERG report almost immediately upon its publication at the end of 1993.

South African neoliberalism marches under the banner of GEAR, an acronym for Growth, Employment, and Redistribution announced in June 1996. Many observers regard GEAR as a sudden retreat from the redistributive commitments of the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP). The RDP formed the basis of the ANC's electoral platform in the 1994 elections, promising a "people-driven" fulfilment of basic needs. In practice, soon after the new government assumed power, strategically placed groups moved the RDP in a neoliberal direction. In addition, as Harold Wolpe noted in an incisive article written shortly before his death in 1995, the RDP was riddled with tensions:

firstly, while the RDP operates on a deeply contested terrain, in crucial respects it eradicates sources of contradiction and probably contestation and conflict by asserting harmony; secondly on this basis it constructs a consensual model of society which is the premise for the accomplishments and goals of the RDP; and thirdly, on the basis of this premise, it also conceptualises the state as the unproblematic instrument of the RDP (Wolpe 1995:91).

Proponents of GEAR briskly dismissed the populist discourse of the RDP. In presenting GEAR as a fait accompli, ANC Finance Minister Trevor Manuel made clear that it was non-negotiable.

The central premise of GEAR is that a conventional neoliberal package—tight fiscal austerity, monetary discipline, wage restraints, corporate taxes reduction, privatization, trade liberalization and the phasing out of exchange controls—will lure private investment (both domestic and foreign), unleash rapid export-led growth, tighten labour markets and drive up wages. In an apparent departure from orthodox neoliberalism, several pieces of post-apartheid legislation provide for some degree of protection of workers in formal employment: these include the Labour Relations Act (LRA) of 1995, which entrenches rights of organized workers; the Basic Conditions of Employment Act of 1997, which establishes minimum standards for those not subject to collective bargaining, including working time and the rights of pregnant women; and the Employment Equity Act of 1998, which prohibits unfair discrimination.

Designed to appease the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), labour legislation is currently under threat.

Defenders of GEAR often point out that social spending forms a relatively large proportion of the budget. On one level, this is certainly the case. According to Mokate (2000:66–67), between 1994–1995 and 1997–1998, for example, the share of social services (including health, education, social security, and welfare and housing) in government spending rose from 45 per cent to 46.9 per cent—a figure significantly higher than the average for East Asia (33.5 per cent), South Asia (26.5 per cent), other parts of sub-Saharan Africa (26.1 per cent), Latin America (31.3 per cent) and the Middle East/North Africa (28.6 per cent). Yet things are not as bright as they appear at first glance. First, if one looks at social spending as a proportion of GDP the picture changes, since fiscal austerity has meant that total government spending as a proportion of GDP is relatively low. Second, not all budgeted expenditures are actually spent; the Department of Welfare, for example, was able to disburse only 1 per cent of the R204 million (approximately \$29 million) it received for poverty relief programmes in the 1998/1999 financial year, and there is a similar pattern across other ministries.

While these spending logjams may well be temporary problems that will be ironed out in time, there is a third dimension of fiscal austerity with profound long-term implications—namely, the proportion of the South African budget going to “economic services” (about 10 per cent) is extremely small and dramatically lower than averages in other parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America. This includes, very importantly, land reform, which has thus far received a miniscule proportion of the limited budget—a large chunk of which had also not been spent by the late 1990s. There is a further irony. Just as the backlogs in spending on land programmes were beginning to move through the pipeline, the Ministry of Land Affairs put a stop to what was probably the most effective of the land reform programmes in terms of redistribution on the grounds that policy will henceforth focus on developing a capitalist farmer class. Cherryl Walker (2002) provides a detailed account of these policy shifts in her superb study of land reform and its relationship to gender in post-apartheid South Africa. I will return later to suggest some important connections between the history of dispossession and the conditions of reproduction of labour, and how these in turn are linked with the rising costs and privatization of urban services.

Before doing so, I want to sketch the broad contours of trends in growth, employment and redistribution in the era of post-apartheid neoliberalism. To say that economic performance has fallen short of GEAR targets is an understatement. Direct foreign investment has been negligible, particularly in industry; domestic capital has continued to flow out of the country; and formal sector employment seems to be contracting at an accelerating rate.

**Table 1: Trends in growth and employment**

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Growth	3.2	3.1	4.2	2.5	0.6	0.9*
Employment	-0.4	-1.1	-0.7	-1.7	-3.7	na

Growth is defined as per cent change in GDP at constant 1995 prices; employment is defined as per cent change in employment in the non-agricultural formal sector. \* The growth figure for 1999 is an estimate. Source: South African Reserve Bank 1999.

All indications are that employment has continued its precipitous decline not only in non-agricultural sectors, but in agriculture as well. In a study conducted in 1996 for the International Labour Organization (ILO), Bell and Cataneo predicted that import liberalization was likely to have large negative effects on manufacturing employment, including employment in relatively low-wage sectors and regions where women workers are concentrated. They also maintained that South Africa's comparative advantage in international trade lies in capital-intensive manufacturing and not, as is traditionally argued, in labour-intensive sectors. Drawing on a growing body of more recent research, Imraan Valodia endorses these arguments. Trade and industrial policy in the post-1994 period have, he argues, brought about extremely rapid exposure to global competition, and are beginning to shift the economy onto a path of capital intensification – with sharply differential implications for men and women workers.

First, the employment effects [of trade liberalization] are impacting most negatively on those sectors of the economy that employ large numbers of women. The restructuring processes in these labour-intensive industries have resulted in massive job losses in sectors that have traditionally employed large numbers of women. A recent ILO study...estimated an 18% fall in clothing and textile industries between 1994 and 1997. The negative employment effects are being generated primarily through processes of rationalisation and downsizing in industrial enterprises, processes which, a number of case studies have shown...are increasingly leading to informalisation and flexibilisation of women's work. Second, the longer-term trajectory of the South African economy is being shifted to capital-intensive production, thereby favouring the employment of men in the formal sector of the economy. The pattern that seems to be emerging is therefore that the short-term costs of trade liberalisation are being borne disproportionately by women, whilst the potential longer-term employment benefits of the liberalisation process are likely to favour men (Valodia 2000:6).

In addition to growing unemployment, a number of recent studies document a rapid rise in sub-contracting and other "flexible" labour practices, particularly in the clothing industry. The Confederation of Employers of South Africa (COFESA), for example, advises employers on how to convert employment contracts into service contracts, thereby transforming workers into "independent contractors" and bypassing minimum standards labour legislation and collective bargaining agreements (Valodia 2000). At the same time, growing numbers of women are ending up in the survivalist segment of the informal economy where, despite official commitment to "small and medium enterprises", access to state support is generally very limited (Lund et al. 2000).

The most recently available evidence on trends in income distribution and poverty deals with the period 1991 to 1996. In a report entitled **Winners and Losers: South Africa's Changing Income Distribution in the 1990s**, Whiteford and van Seventer (1999) estimated that, while

racial inequalities persisted—white per capita income was almost nine times higher than Africans' in 1996—black South Africans' share of income rose from 29.9 per cent to 35.7 per cent between 1991 and 1996. Yet almost all of this increase was concentrated in the top 10 per cent of black households, while the poorest 40 per cent of black households suffered a fall in income of around 21 per cent. All indications are that these tendencies accelerated after 1996 in the context of massive increases in unemployment, declining private sector investment and strict fiscal austerity. In addition, HIV/AIDS is taking a terrible toll.

If one turns from these bleak and depressing macro indicators to the dynamics at work in particular places, a more varied picture emerges that is suggestive of both possibilities and constraints. Beginning in mid-1996, the second phase of my research focused on detailed historical and ethnographic research in Newcastle and in Ladysmith. The starting point of this second phase was significant, because it marked not only the advent of GEAR, but also local government elections in KwaZulu-Natal. The first phase of local government restructuring (1995–2000) entailed former white towns and black townships joining together as single administrative entities. It was also accompanied by the increasing importance of the local state as the key site of both redistribution and accumulation.

The rising importance of the local state in the context of neoliberal globalization is of course an extremely widespread phenomenon, occurring in many different parts of the world. Yet in post-apartheid South Africa, it has appeared in a particularly stark and intense form. As part of the political compromises in the constitutional negotiations, the first phase of local government restructuring (1995–2000) reinscribed apartheid geographies, with former white areas garnering a disproportionate share of power. Over this period, some of the key contradictions inherent in the post-apartheid order have been deflected to what has come to be termed in official parlance “the developmental local state”. With only 10 per cent of municipal budgets coming from central government coffers, local authorities are responsible for raising 90 per cent of their revenues locally (mainly from property taxes and service fees). At the same time, both central authorities and local constituents are placing growing demands on the local state. A statement by Crispin Olver, Deputy Director-General of the Local Government section of the Department of Constitutional Development in 1998, lays out the situation with stunning clarity:

South Africa is currently undergoing a major change within its public sector, in which government functions, virtually across the board, are being decentralized to the local level. District health services, municipal police forces, local housing programs, child care—name the department and there will be some or other function on its way down. Two forces are driving this decentralisation: a fiscal squeeze at national and provincial level, leading to the shedding of functions (and hence to what we call 'unfunded mandates' being dropped on local government); and a realisation that many functions can be provided more efficiently at local level.

Tensions provoked by this unfunded devolution of functions became powerfully apparent in the first phase of local government restructuring. Local politicians and bureaucrats have found themselves perched precariously on fault lines, confronted with direct and urgent demands for redistribution in the face of fierce fiscal austerity and, simultaneously, with helping to promote

“local economic development”—a process that frequently pits different groups and classes against one another, and places local authorities under intense pressure to attract foreign investment.

Since 1996, I have been following how these processes are playing out in Ladysmith and Newcastle and their adjacent townships. From a comparative perspective, the two places are particularly interesting. Only 100 kilometres apart, both exemplify apartheid-era dispossession and industrial decentralization described earlier—including close connections with Taiwan and, more recently, with mainland China. Each is comprised of a former white town separated by a “buffer zone” from black townships formed through forced removals in the 1960s and 1970s. Newcastle is somewhat larger than Ladysmith, but in most other respects they are structurally very similar. Yet local political dynamics are dramatically different. The ANC is far stronger in Ladysmith than in Newcastle, the labour movement is far better organized, and local councillors are held far more accountable to their constituents.

In my book, I trace out the overlapping struggles in multiple arenas, both local and trans-local, that have produced these sharply divergent trajectories (see also Hart 1998). I also show how race, ethnicity and gender articulated with class processes in distinctively different ways in the two places. For purposes of the present paper, I want to draw on the sharply divergent local political dynamics in Ladysmith and Newcastle in the second half of the 1990s to explore the tension between so-called LED (local economic development) strategies on the one hand and key social policies—those having to do with service charges in the townships—on the other.

Since 1996, the central government has made clear that local economic development—especially, attracting FDI—is one of the primary responsibilities of local government. In towns like Ladysmith and Newcastle, white local government officials have long been engaged in strategies to pull in investment. What is new is that councillors representing township constituents are now charged not only with attracting investment, but also with linking LED to poverty alleviation and securing the conditions of accumulation by maintaining labour discipline.

A set of 10 case studies in different parts of South Africa commissioned by the Department of Constitutional Development in 1998 concluded that “hardly any of the municipalities reviewed in this project have made any formal attempt to explicitly link economic development with poverty alleviation” (DCD 1998:5) and that “the essential policy direction appears to be a reliance upon market forces to allow the benefits of trickle-down to poor communities” (DCD 1998:31). Efforts to draw more general lessons from the case studies politely avoid any reference to GEAR, although one contributor notes that “SA local governments on their own cannot solve the complex problems of poverty and erase the legacies of apartheid planning” (DCD 1998:32). Yet this point is flatly contradicted by the co-ordinator of the study, who asserts: “Local initiatives and *relative autonomy from national resources* are key elements to ensure robust local partnerships and collaborative strategies” (DCD 1998:52, emphasis added).

The ironies inherent in such claims become clear when one considers how active LED strategies have played out in practice in Ladysmith and Newcastle. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Newcastle was probably one of the largest recipients of industrial FDI relative to its size in South Africa; since the mid-1990s, Ladysmith has taken over that position with the influx of industrial investment from mainland China. Both places are deeply connected with transnational centres of accumulation, and represent precisely the pattern of export-oriented FDI upon which GEAR is predicated. In both places these FDI-led local growth strategies have proved socially explosive. As in the past, the intensity of struggles on the factory floor derives not only from relatively low wages and poor working conditions, but also the way racial, ethnic and gendered forms of difference are produced along with material commodities.

These conflicts at the point of production are, in turn, deeply intertwined with struggles over the conditions of reproduction of labour, albeit in locally specific and varied ways. To appreciate the larger significance of these local divergences, one must focus on how the costs and provision of urban services have changed in the post-apartheid era. In large urban townships like Soweto, formerly run by so-called Black Local Authorities, boycotts of rents and service payments became a key weapon in the struggle against apartheid in the 1980s (Swilling et al. 1991). In 1995, the new government launched a lavishly funded national campaign entitled Masakhane (an Nguni word meaning “let’s build together”), ostensibly aimed at building popular confidence in local government and reconfiguring understandings of citizens’ rights and responsibilities. In practice, Masakhane quickly became associated with an effort to reverse the “culture of non-payment”. Yet the following year payment levels fell still further, and the amount owed to local authorities has continued to increase. At the same time, the costs of service provision have been rising, and municipal services are increasingly being privatized. By 1997 there were widespread service disconnections, accompanied by public protests against municipalities that, in some areas, became extremely violent. These underscored the contradictory imperatives embodied in the local state in the post-apartheid era. In addition to securing the conditions of accumulation, newly elected local councillors have confronted the fallout from fiscal austerity, as well as often fierce opposition from former white areas, to any sort of cross-subsidization of services. In former bantustan townships like Madadeni (Newcastle) and Ezakheni (Ladysmith), post-apartheid austerity has hit particularly hard. During the apartheid era, these townships received relatively high levels of state subsidies, and township households paid relatively low, flat service charges that were in fact well below the costs of service provision. Under the new dispensation, local authorities are under intense pressure to raise service charges.

In Newcastle, struggles over rising service charges have been extremely chaotic. The crisis erupted shortly after the local government elections in mid-1996, when the ANC unexpectedly won the election. Historically, the Newcastle townships had been a stronghold of the Zulu nationalist Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). One of the most unpopular Taiwanese industrialists joined the IFP, paying huge amounts of money into party coffers on the understanding that he would become mayor. As he explained to Alison Todes and me in 1995, his plan was to turn Newcastle into a free trade zone, build an airport and ban all union activity! What in fact

happened was that IFP failed to win a majority of seats in the council—largely because numbers of registered IFP supporters stayed away from the polls. In July 1996, many Madadeni residents expressed considerable resentment about the money the Taiwanese industrialist spent trying to buy votes. Why, they asked, does he not pay decent wages if he is so rich? Soon after the local government elections in 1996, white municipal bureaucrats—who retained considerable power—pushed through a budget that increased service charges from R16 to R84 a month. ANC councillors claimed that the increased service charges took them totally by surprise; they were not given a chance to go through the budget document and were railroaded into approving it. Escalating service charges provoked an explosion of resentment in the townships, resulting in an almost total boycott of service payments. Despite a costly public relations campaign to “win hearts and minds” of township residents, the boycott has continued and conditions in Madadeni and the adjacent township of Osizweni have deteriorated sharply.

The contrast with what has happened in Ladysmith and the adjacent township of Ezakheni is dramatic. The ANC won a major victory in the 1996 election, prompting the resignation of six senior white municipal officials and enabling the ANC councillors to appoint a new top echelon of bureaucrats. Instead of simply hiking up service charges as in Newcastle, municipal bureaucrats and councillors representing the townships worked out a strategy to maintain service charges at a relatively low level while increasing payment rates and local revenues. They also instituted an extraordinary system of open budget meetings, consulting with constituents about their priorities. Although operating within a tightly constrained budget, local government has brought about some quite significant improvements in the townships and has been extremely successful in gaining access to provincial-level sources of revenue for social services. Yet councillors and township residents recognize that the low, flat service charges are not sustainable. In the absence of large increases in state subsidies, a system of metering will have to be put in place—at which point, costs of living are likely to escalate.

Although councillors and local bureaucrats in Ladysmith have managed for the time being to stave off the devastating effects of fiscal austerity, their efforts to attract investment have generated profound tension. On one level they have been extraordinarily successful, pulling in some 20 factories from mainland China since 1996. Over the same period the flow of Taiwanese investment into Newcastle has slowed dramatically. This contraction reflects both the South African government’s recognition of mainland China instead of Taiwan in November 1996, and perhaps more importantly, the sharp decline in the knitwear industry in Newcastle as a consequence of cheap imports from mainland China. As we saw earlier, the commodities (mostly brightly coloured jerseys) are identical to those made in Newcastle and are produced, ironically, by relatives of Taiwanese industrialists who moved to southern coastal provinces of China. Not surprisingly, a number of Taiwanese who have remained in Newcastle have switched from industry to commerce, selling imported knitwear mainly to street traders. The mainland Chinese industries that have moved into Ladysmith include not only clothing but also various forms of metal-working, stationery, and pots and pans. They are all linked to the Shanghai local government and are using Ladysmith as a point from which to break into African markets and, in the case of clothing, to take advantage of South African quotas under

the Multi-Fibre Agreement. Employing mainly women, their wages and labour practices are very similar to those of small-scale Taiwanese producers in Newcastle.

The influx of mainland Chinese investment has generated deep conflict between ANC councillors on the one hand, and key industrial unions on the other. This is all the more ironic, as many of the councillors were former members of the militant youth movement in the 1980s that received strong support from the unions; others, particularly women, are former shop stewards. Union officials claim that councillors fail to inform investors about the Labour Relations Act; that employers systematically violate workers' rights; and that unions are constantly being called upon by dissatisfied workers to intervene on their behalf. For ANC councillors, Chinese investment presents a dilemma: they are aware of the poor wages and working conditions, but also of the need to generate employment. They are confronted with their constituents' resentment over wages and working conditions in Chinese factories, and direct challenges from erstwhile allies in COSATU.

These dilemmas were evident in the open budget meetings in the Ladysmith township of Ezakheni. Following a particularly hostile challenge from a group of township residents over conditions in Chinese factories, the mayor made the following speech:

This community is aware that I am the representative sent overseas to invite industrialists to locate here. The issue of bringing industrialists is a real headache. Industrialists are looking for a particular type of workforce. If we go overseas we go kneeling to beg. It is difficult to beg a person and put conditions. Yes, we have government by the people for the people. But the industrialists are not on our side. What happened was that the only industrialists prepared to come are Chinese. The Europeans are not interested. Once abroad, we asked why are you paying such low wages? What they told us was that the products are cheap. When sold, they don't bring much profits. These industries are just feelers. If conditions are good, they say they will bring bigger industrialists. In this situation we are in difficulties. If we demand more, they will go—we will send them away. We need to take this seriously. When they say they will leave, they will do it. In Maritzburg, 600 workers recently lost their jobs. I also give an example of an article I read. We have countries around us that are poorer—like Zimbabwe. There was a government employee there who worked for more than two months before he received his salary. He was given two million in Zimbabwean money. But if we convert to rands, he only got R48. As the situation is, when industrialists are threatening to leave they really mean it. [In other places] they are paying less than in our country. People should be able to differentiate these issues [i.e. those that we can do something about from that we cannot]. Roads, sewerage, and water—these are issues for this municipality and we will see to it. I thank the community, even if they are shouting at us. They are hard on us so we will be able to work better in the future (closing speech by the Mayor of Ladysmith-Emnambithi at an open budget meeting held in C Section of Ezakheni, 6 July 1997, translated from isiZulu to English by one of the councillors).

This vivid statement of the vagaries of transnational capitalism, articulated through official discourses of neoliberal globalization, underscores the embattled position in which ANC councillors found themselves.

## Conclusions

A key tenet of neoliberal orthodoxy is a sort of economic Darwinism in which export-oriented, low-wage production forms the lowest set of rungs on a predetermined evolutionary ladder. In this model of universal convergence, economically “backward” societies—or segments within them—must ascend the ladder in an orderly fashion, biting the bullet of low wages and oppressive labour conditions. The ladder itself is constituted through foreign direct investment, supposedly lured in by restraints on government spending, high interest rates and favourable exchange rates. In practice, as a number of critics have pointed out, foreign capital drawn in by these measures is far more likely to be volatile portfolio investment than directly productive investment. In addition, as the Brazilian activist and intellectual Roberto Unger observes, the neoliberal project is unsustainable on its own terms, particularly in the context of profound inequalities:

Carried to the hilt, it produces massive unemployment...and accelerates internal dualism: the division of the country between a minority of beneficiaries and a majority of victims. More generally, it leaves government without the resources and capabilities with which to invest in either people or infrastructure. As social needs go unattended, bottlenecks in the production system begin to build up. Moreover, the draconian policy may prove self-defeating by sapping the very confidence it was designed to inspire, as domestic and foreign investors begin to expect future political trouble from present social unrest (Unger 1998:57).

One response has been a form of conservative social democracy that argues for some degree of redistribution to contain social unrest and enable the neoliberal project to move forward. It is this sort of revisionist neoliberalism that is now popular in the World Bank, in the guise of “social development” and “social capital” (Hart 2001).

The far greater challenge, posed with particular force and clarity by Unger, is to refuse the Thatcherite dictum that “there is no alternative” to neoliberalism in either its orthodox or revisionist form. In opposing the economism that underpins neoliberal discourses of globalization, a key imperative—one that Gramsci (1971) made clear in his prison writings—is to avoid swinging to the opposite extreme of voluntarist notions of radical contingency and endlessly open possibilities.

By focusing on the relationship between production and the conditions of reproduction of labour, this paper has called attention to the historically specific—and deeply gendered as well as racialized—processes and practices that have shaped what are, in effect, sharply divergent trajectories of labour-intensive forms of industrialization. It has also shown how the East Asian “cases” that neoliberal proponents invoke in support of their evolutionary claims are sharply at odds with the evolutionary model. Instead, they represent distinctively non-Western forms of accumulation, effectively underwritten by massive redistributive reforms driven originally by Mao’s mobilization of the Chinese peasantry in the first part of the twentieth century. The broad significance of these East Asian trajectories for contemporary South African debates is that they force the history of racialized dispossession to the forefront of attention and illuminate its deep connections with the erosion of the social wage across a wide swathe of South African society.

In the post-apartheid era, the social and spatial legacy of dispossession is evident in the profound tensions between production and the conditions of reproduction of labour. These tensions, in turn, have become condensed within the so-called developmental local state. Structural constraints inherited from the past are being reworked in significantly different ways in seemingly similar places. On one level, the participatory budget process that emerged in Ladysmith in the first phase of local government restructuring represents an example of precisely the sort of institutional innovation to which Unger calls attention. Yet the broader configurations of political-economic forces have imposed sharp constraints on these creative democratic impulses.

Pressures on the local state have intensified with the latest round of local government restructuring set in place at the end of 2000, which slashed the number of local authorities and vastly increased their size. These new demarcations effectively dissolve rural-urban boundaries and create a space for desperately poor residents of rural ghettos to lay claims on the severely limited resources of towns and small cities like Ladysmith and Newcastle. The character of South African society for generations to come will be defined by whether or not the political inclusion of these residents in reformed local state structures translates into concrete material benefits that improve their lives, and the forms of power relations—including gender—through which this does or does not happen.

The dissolution of rural-urban boundaries brought about by this latest round of local government restructuring underscores the salience and urgency of agrarian questions in this era of neoliberal “globalization.” There is now a large and growing body of literature that documents in compelling detail the limited and halting character of agrarian reform in the post-apartheid era, including the sharp disjuncture between a formal commitment to gender equality and the actual practices of land redistribution and tenure reform (for example, Cousins 2000; Walker 2002).

Through a comparative focus on the connections between production and the conditions of reproduction of labour, this paper has tried to shed some new light on agrarian questions. The point of drawing on East Asian connections to dramatize the history of dispossession is not to propose a technocratic redistributive “solution” to the evident limits of low-wage export production in post-apartheid South Africa. Instead, these connections provide a means for delinking the land question from agriculture narrowly defined, and re-articulating it in terms of the social wage and broader livelihood imperatives.

At least in principle, a broadly based and historically grounded redefinition of the social wage holds open the possibility for organized labour to shift from a rearguard defence of diminishing, relatively well-paid and predominantly male jobs to forging broader alliances and coalitions with other social forces—including those pressing for agrarian reform, as well as other movements such as those taking shape around HIV/AIDS—to engage both with macroeconomic policy, and with locally and regionally specific conditions. As Hein Marais

(1998) has pointed out, a strategy of connecting struggles in multiple arenas is not simply a matter of pitting “civil society” against “the state”, but of recognizing how they define one another through constantly shifting engagements. Whether and how a strategy of linking what are commonly seen as separate rural and urban struggles under the rubric of the social wage could work in practice is likely to hinge crucially on understandings of gender not simply as “women” but as defining elements in the exercise of power, deeply entwined with race, ethnicity and other dimensions of difference, as well as with the material conditions in which people find themselves.

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